

THREE IMPERIAL BYZANTINE SARCOPHAGI DISCOVERED IN 1750*

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THE evidence to be discussed here has already been the object of a short article by A. M. Schneider.¹ Seeing, however, that Schneider's conclusions are not acceptable, there is reason to examine this topic once more.

The French manufacturer Jean-Claude Flachet, who resided in Constantinople from 1740 until 1755, and, as First Merchant to the Sultan, enjoyed considerable freedom of movement within the grounds of the Grand Seraglio,² reports as follows on the discovery in 1750 of three Byzantine sarcophagi:

"Les Grecs du bas Empire ont transmis leur goût aux Turcs. Nous n'avons rien de remarquable en ce genre des Empereurs qui ont succédé à Constantin. Il y a même apparence que sous cet Empereur on étoit moins jaloux qu'auparavant de perpétuer la mémoire des grands Seigneurs & des fameux Capitaines dans les mausolées; ils étoient d'une architecture moins belle & moins frappante. Trois tombeaux qu'on a trouvés en 1750 peuvent en servir de preuve (planche 12, fig. 29, 30, 31 [= our fig. 1]). Les recherches que j'ai faites n'ont servi qu'à me convaincre que l'un avoit été destiné par Constantin à inhumer sa famille, et que les autres appartenoient à quelques Princes de sa maison. On n'y a cependant trouvé ni ossements, ni poussière. J'en donne le détail, pour la satisfaction des Antiquaires.

"Le premier (fig. 29) qui est de porphyre,

* In writing this short paper I have profited greatly from Philip Grierson's study on "The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337-1042)," which appears at the beginning of this volume. I should also like to thank Mr. E. J. W. Hawkins for the photographs reproduced here as figures 2 and 3 and for supplying me the exact dimensions of the sarcophagus pictured in figure 3.

¹ "Das Regium sepulchrum apud comitatum zu Konstantinopel," *Nachrichten d. Akad. d. Wiss. in Göttingen*, Phil.-hist. Klasse (1950), pp. 15-21.

² On Flachet's career, see N. M. Penzer, *The Harēm* (London, 1936), p. 44 ff.

est composé de deux pièces. Celle d'en bas est arrondie; elle a six pieds et demi de longueur [2.11 m.],³ trois de hauteur [0.975 m.], et trois et demi [1.14 m.] de largeur. Le couvert est en dos d'âne; il a sept pieds [2.275 m.] de longueur. Les deux faces, tant du tombeau que du couvert, sont applaties; une petite moulure sert de décoration à celle du tombeau: celle du couvert présente une croix dans une couronne de feuillage. Le second (fig. 30) est aussi de porphyre. Il a huit pieds [2.60 m.] de long sur quatre et demi [1.46 m.] de large, & cinq et demi [1.79 m.] de haut. Une moulure regne tout autour. Il est couvert d'une table de la même pierre, épaisse d'un pied & demi [0.49 m.]. On n'a trouvé, à ce qu'il paroît, que le couvert du troisième (fig. 31). Il est d'un beau verd antique. Il est orné de sept dômes, dont il y en a six d'un pied & demi [0.49 m.] de hauteur, & un de deux pieds & demi [0.81 m.]. Il a sept pieds de longueur [2.275 m.], et trois & demi [1.14 m.] de largeur, sur cinq pieds & quelques lignes [1.80 m.] de hauteur de la base à la cime de la coupole du grand dôme. Ils étoient enfoncés dans la terre à côté du palais impérial. Il paroît par une enceinte de murs qu'on destinoit cet emplacement à servir de sépulture aux Empereurs. Dès que les ouvriers en eurent fait la découverte lorsqu'ils creusoient les fondements de quelques nouveaux appartements qu'on faisoit au serrail, on m'envoya avertir pour en lever le plan. On étoit d'abord résolu de les faire scier, pour en revêtir les murailles d'une mosquée. Ce dessin n'a point eu d'exécution. Ils existent encore sans avoir été endommagés, jusqu'à ce qu'il plaise au Sultan d'en disposer. Il en fera peut-être des bains, ou des abreuvoirs pour les chevaux du serrail. On les admiroit lorsqu'on les eut nettoyés. Ils devoient plaire à des yeux qui

³ Assuming that Flachet was using the old French foot (*pied du Roi*) which equalled 0.32484 m. or 12.7893 English inches: see P. Kelly, *The Universal Cambist and Commercial Instructor*, 2nd ed., I (London, 1831), p. 134.

n'estiment dans l'Architecture que la plus grande simplicité."⁴

In discussing this account, Schneider takes it for granted that the sarcophagi were found *in situ*. He draws attention to a passage of Marcellinus Comes, *sub anno* 382, to the effect that the body of Valentinian I (d. 375) was brought from Italy to Constantinople by Theodosius I and buried *apud comitatum regio in sepulchro*.⁵ Translating *comitatus* as "imperial palace" and not in its usual sense of "imperial suite," Schneider concludes that Valentinian was buried not in the church of the Holy Apostles, like most other emperors, but in a mausoleum situated in the vicinity of the Great Palace. It was this mausoleum, he believes, that was unearthed in 1750. Concerning the three sarcophagi, Schneider suggests that one of the first two, possibly the trough-shaped one, belonged to Valentinian; the second porphyry sarcophagus, he says, cannot be identified, unless it was that of Constantia (daughter of Constantius II) whose body, according to the *Chronicon Paschale*,⁶ was brought to Constantinople in 383 and buried there (without indication of place); of the third sarcophagus, Schneider says merely that it belonged, at the earliest, to the "middle Byzantine" period. The remainder of Schneider's article is devoted to determining the exact place where the sarcophagi were found: this was, in the author's opinion, the site now occupied by the Archaeological Museum.

Schneider's ingenious hypothesis is, unfortunately, completely erroneous. The place of Valentinian's burial is indicated both by Leo Grammaticus⁷ and by the *Chronicon Altiante*⁸ which is studied by Philip Grierson in this volume. As might have been expected, Valentinian was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles. There is nothing to indicate

the existence of an imperial mausoleum in the vicinity of the Great Palace. The discovery, along with the sarcophagi, of an "enceinte de murs" is of no significance: one can hardly avoid, when making an excavation anywhere in Constantinople, finding some remains of ancient walls. There is, on the other hand, every reason to suppose, as we shall see presently, that the sarcophagi had been brought to the Seraglio from outside. The early sultans accumulated a considerable amount of Byzantine sculpture in the grounds of the Seraglio presumably with a view to using it as building material; it is sufficient to recall that some of the imperial sarcophagi that are now exposed in front of the Archaeological Museum were discovered in 1847 in the second court of the Seraglio. All authorities agree that these sarcophagi must have come from the church of the Holy Apostles. We must therefore attempt to provide a different explanation for the sarcophagi discovered in 1750.

Sarcophagus no. 3, of which only the lid was found, was of a most unusual, if not unique, shape. It reproduced the form of a church crowned with seven domes. The exact arrangement of the domes is not entirely clear owing to the faulty perspective of Flachet's drawing, but it appears that two were disposed along each of the long sides of the sarcophagus, one in the middle of each of the short sides, and one—the tallest—in the center. Schneider was, of course, right in saying that this sarcophagus was "mittelbyzantinisch," if not later. We can go further: this was almost certainly the tomb of Manuel I Comnenus. We know that Manuel was laid to rest in the monastery of the Pantocrator, under a stone "which was parted into seven pinnacles" (ὅς καὶ εἰς ἑπτὰ διέσχισται λοφίᾱς).⁹ Two years after Manuel's death, in 1182, there occurred at this tomb a dramatic scene: Andronicus I, immediately after assuming power, visited it and feigned to shed tears over the mortal remains of his persecutor. But he was overheard—or so it was alleged—muttering imprecations against Manuel. Among the words he is reported to have uttered were these: "As for thee, this seven-pointed stone (ὁ ἑπτακόρυμβος οὐτοσί . . . λίθος) shall confine thee like an

⁴ *Observations sur le commerce et sur les arts d'une partie de l'Europe, de l'Asie, de l'Afrique, et même des Indes Orientales* (Lyon, 1766), II, pp. 1–4.

⁵ Mommsen, *Chronica minora*, II (Mon. Germ. Hist., *Auct. ant.*, XI), p. 61.

⁶ Bonn ed., p. 563; cf. Mommsen, *Chron. minora*, I (Mon. Germ. Hist., *Auct. ant.*, IX), p. 244.

⁷ Bonn ed., p. 96.

⁸ *Origo civitatum Italiae seu Venetiarum*, ed. R. Cessi, *Fonti per la storia d'Italia* (Rome, 1933), p. 105.

⁹ Nicetas Choniates, Bonn ed., p. 289₁₁.

inescapable prison, as thou sleepest a deep sleep to be awakened only by the last trumpet."¹⁰ There is one slight difficulty in the identification of Manuel's tomb with that found in 1750: the former, according to Nicetas Choniates, was of a mournful blackish color (λίθος τὴν μελανίαν ὑποκρινόμενος καὶ διὰ τοῦτο συγγνάζοντι ξοικῶς),¹¹ while the latter is described as having been of verd antique. But this is not a serious objection, since verd antique can be quite dark, and besides Flachatz need not have been using this term in its precise connotation. Unless, therefore, another example of a seven-domed tomb is adduced, we may believe that the lid discovered in 1750 had actually belonged to Manuel's sarcophagus in the Pantocrator monastery.¹² This monastery appears to have been converted into a mosque within a few years of the fall of Constantinople,¹³ so it was probably at that time that Manuel's tomb was removed and transported to the Seraglio.¹⁴

Turning now to the two porphyry sarcophagi, we should make a preliminary observation: no. 2 is, in all probability, represented upside down. Most of the extant porphyry sarcophagi have a moulding at the base; a sarcophagus of this type, lacking its lid (cf. fig. 3), would, if turned upside down, look exactly like

Flachat's figure 30. If this observation is correct, then Flachatz was not altogether accurate in stating that sarcophagus no. 2 was covered with a slab: the flat surface with the moulding along its edges (i.e. the bottom of the sarcophagus) must, judging by the extant examples, have been of one piece with the remainder of the trough.

The addition of two porphyry sarcophagi to the series that is still in existence adds complication to a problem that has been debated many times, though without much success. Ebersolt, writing in 1921, came to the conclusion that all the imperial porphyry sarcophagi mentioned in Byzantine texts (nine, according to his reckoning) were still in existence at the time he wrote, either in their entirety or in part.¹⁵ The same view was upheld by Vasiliev in 1948.¹⁶ Delbrueck, on the other hand, reckoned that there had been ten imperial porphyry sarcophagi of which eight were preserved.¹⁷ This problem must naturally be examined once more in view of Flachatz's testimony.

From the evidence provided by Byzantine texts (they have been discussed several times)¹⁸ and by the *Chronicon Altitate*, we may draw up the following list of porphyry sarcophagi. They belonged to:

1. Constantine I
2. Constantius II
3. Julian
4. Jovian

¹⁵ *Mission archéologique de Constantinople* (Paris, 1921), p. 11.

¹⁶ "Imperial Porphyry Sarcophagi in Constantinople," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 4 (1948), p. 10ff.

¹⁷ *Antike Porphyrywerke* (Berlin-Leipzig, 1932), p. 222 ff.

¹⁸ In addition to the studies of Ebersolt, Delbrueck, and Vasiliev, see esp. G. Downey, "The Tombs of the Byzantine Emperors at the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, LXXIX (1959), pp. 27-51. Downey reprints in convenient form three Byzantine lists of imperial tombs: that given in the *De Cerimoniis* (Bonn ed., p. 642 ff.), the one originally published by Du Cange (which Downey calls List C), and the one first published by Banduri (which he calls List R). That Lists C and R are variants of the same text which was appended to Recension C of the *Patria* (composed under Alexius I) has been shown by A. Maricq, "Notes philologiques," *Byzantion*, XXII (1952), pp. 370-2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 333₁₃. This scene is eloquently described by Charles Diehl, *Figures byzantines*, 9th ed. (Paris, 1938), II, pp. 117-8, who by mistake places it in the church of the Holy Apostles.

¹¹ Nicetas, p. 289₁₀.

¹² Manuel's tomb was placed under a wide arch connecting the church with the adjoining *heroon* (Nicetas, *loc. cit.*), i.e. probably between the south and central churches.

¹³ A. G. Paspates, *Βυζαντινὰι μελέται* (Constantinople, 1877), pp. 312-3.

¹⁴ Among the Christian relics collected by Mehmed II in the Seraglio was a stone on which Christ was alleged to have been born. See F. Babinger, *Reliquienschacher am Osmanenhof im XV. Jahrhundert*, *Sitz. d. Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss.*, Philos.-hist. Kl., 1956, Heft 2, p. 19. This, as Babinger suggests, may actually have been the stone on which Christ was reputed to have been laid after the Crucifixion. The stone in question had been brought from Ephesus to Constantinople by Manuel I and was placed next to his tomb in the Pantocrator monastery (Nicetas, *loc. cit.*). If it was this stone that Mehmed II removed to the Seraglio, it is all the more likely that Manuel's tomb shared the same fate.

5. Valentinian I¹⁹
6. Theodosius I
7. Arcadius
8. Eudoxia, the wife of Arcadius
9. Theodosius II
10. Marcian.

Delbrueck's reckoning appears, therefore, to be correct.²⁰ It should be added that all the known porphyry sarcophagi were in the church of the Holy Apostles; hence there is a strong presumption that the two described by Flachat came from the same place.

The number of porphyry sarcophagi in existence today is eight rather than nine. These are (following Delbrueck's numbering):

1. Rounded sarcophagus (Archaeological Museum, no. 3155) which Delbrueck considers to be of Ptolemaic workmanship. It is the biggest of all (fig. 2).

2. Fragment of flat side with cupids within a rinceau (no. 806).

3. Rectangular trough without moulding or lid in the courtyard of the Nuruosmaniye mosque.

4-8. Five rectangular sarcophagi with gabled lids. Two of these are in the courtyard of St. Irene: one complete, bearing a chrism on top of a T, the other (fig. 3) without a lid. The rest are in front of the Archaeological Museum (nos. 3154, 3156, 2391). No. 2391 has no lid. In addition, there is part of a lid in two pieces (no. 3157) which may have belonged either to the lidless sarcophagus in St. Irene or to no. 2391.

The alleged ninth sarcophagus is represented by a very small fragment discovered on the Seraglio Point shortly before 1921.²¹ It is decorated with a moulding. Delbrueck

believes that it did not belong to a sarcophagus.²² Considering its small size (27 × 45 × 12 cm.), it would indeed be rash to argue that it formed part of a sarcophagus and not some other piece of sculpture.

There can be no doubt that Flachat's first sarcophagus has been lost. But we may ask ourselves whether the second one may not be in existence. One is naturally led to think of the two sarcophagi that have no lids. No. 2391 must be excluded since it was found near Marcian's column; as for the one in St. Irene, its measurements do not agree with those given by Flachat (length at the base 3.24 m., above moulding 2.93 m.; width at the base 2.01 m. on one side, 2.08 m. on the other, above moulding 1.76 m. on one side, 1.79 m. on the other; total height 1.58 m.; whereas the one seen by Flachat was *ca.* 2.60 m. long, 1.46 m. wide and 1.79 m. high). By the same token we are prevented from identifying any of the remaining three gabled sarcophagi with Flachat's no. 2, even if we were to assume that one of these might have been dug up in 1750 without its lid and that the corresponding lid was found at a later date.²³ We may

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 226.

²³ The over-all dimensions of the sarcophagi are given by Delbrueck, *op. cit.*, p. 223ff. Unfortunately, the provenance of some of the gabled sarcophagi is not clear. No. 2391 was found, as we have said, in the vicinity of Marcian's column. Nezih Firatli states that three sarcophagi (3154, 3155, 3156) came from the second court of the Seraglio: *A Short Guide to the Byzantine Works of Art in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul* (Istanbul, 1955), p. 37. Mamboury, on the other hand, says that only two sarcophagi were discovered in the Seraglio (in 1847): "Les fouilles byzantines à Istanbul," *Byzantion*, XI (1936), p. 230. The lids of nos. 3154 and 3155 were extracted from the second court of the Seraglio in 1916. I have found no explicit indication of the provenance of the two sarcophagi now in St. Irene. The Russian traveller A. N. Murav'ev, writing from Constantinople in 1849, says that "several porphyry sarcophagi" had been found close to St. Sophia on the site of the University (this building, erected by Gaspare Fossati, was later used as the Palace of Justice, and burnt down in 1933) and that these had been moved to St. Irene: *Pis'ma s Vostoka*, I (St. Petersburg, 1851), p. 27. If this report is accurate, it must apply to the two sarcophagi that are now in St. Irene. It was *ca.* 1847 that the first collection of antiquities was brought together in St. Irene; this later became the kernel of the Archaeolo-

¹⁹ Mentioned only in the *Chronicon Altinate*, p. 105. That Valentinian was buried in a porphyry sarcophagus has already been surmised by Delbrueck, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

²⁰ The *Chronicon Altinate*, p. 106, adds two more porphyry sarcophagi, those of Anastasius I and of Justin I, but this is almost certainly wrong. According to the Byzantine lists, the sarcophagus of Anastasius was of "Aquitanian" (variants "Anaketian," "Niketian") stone: Downey, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 no. 7, 37 no. 5, 40 no. 6. Concerning the sarcophagus of Justin I there is considerable confusion, but it appears to have been of green Thessalian marble: see Grierson's remarks, *supra*, p. 46.

²¹ Ebersolt, *op. cit.*, p. 7, no. VIII.

therefore conclude that both porphyry sarcophagi seen by Flachet have been lost; the two of them, added to the eight that still exist, bring the total number to ten, which is the number we have obtained from mediaeval lists.

This correspondence is satisfying, although I do not wish to place undue emphasis on it. We may now turn briefly to the problem of the identification of the porphyry sarcophagi. Ebersolt prudently refrained from making any categorical attributions; he did, however, suggest very cautiously that the rounded one (no. 1) might be Julian's, and the fragment with cupids (no. 2) Constantine's.²⁴ In a later article²⁵ he argued that no. 2 was part of the sarcophagus, transferred from Rome to Constantinople, in which both Helena and Constantine I were buried. Delbrueck hazarded three identifications: Constantine's, he thought, was no. 4 (the gabled sarcophagus in St. Irene), Julian's no. 1, and Valentinian's the one in the courtyard of the Nuruosmaniye mosque.²⁶ Vasiliev returned to Ebersolt's hypothesis which he stated with greater emphasis.²⁷

One point only seemed to be certain: that the rounded sarcophagus was Julian's. This was first stated by Dethier²⁸ and upheld, with more or less assurance, in all subsequent studies. The Byzantine lists of tombs do not distinguish between the shape of any of the sarcophagi except in the case of Julian's which is called cylindrical (κυλινδρoειδής).²⁹ Of the extant sarcophagi only one, viz. no. 1, may

be said to fit more or less this description (fig. 2); thus the conclusion that this was Julian's tomb could hardly be avoided. Now, however, we have yet another sarcophagus—Flachat's no. 1—which could be called cylindrical. Indeed, it may be argued that the shape of this sarcophagus was more distinctive as compared to the rest than that of the rounded sarcophagus which still exists, and would thus have been singled out in the Byzantine lists of tombs. On the other hand, the first sarcophagus seen by Flachet was decorated with a cross. Would this symbol have been placed on the Apostate's tomb? Even if this strikes us as inappropriate, it cannot be excluded. Since Julian was given burial in the church of the Holy Apostles—we are not told at what date his body was transferred thither from Tarsus³⁰—he was evidently considered to have been a Christian and could thus have been buried under the sign of the cross. In any case, the identification of Julian's tomb which has, for so long, been considered as certain should now be questioned.

Flachat's first sarcophagus is interesting also from another point of view. In shape (except for the four acroteria that decorate its corners) it offers a striking resemblance to the tombs of the Norman kings of Sicily in the cathedrals of Palermo and Monreale. Like the latter, the Constantinopolitan tomb must also have stood on supports, concave at the top to fit the convex bottom of the urn. In his exhaustive study of the Sicilian tombs Prof. J. Deér has come to the conclusion that they were modelled after antique porphyry troughs in Rome, like the one which was later used as the tomb of Pope Clement XII in the Lateran.³¹ I do not wish to question Deér's convincing demonstration that the Norman kings, in their search for porphyry as also in their search for prototypes, turned to Rome and not to Constantinople. Even if the formal derivation of the Sicilian tombs does not require any further explanation, the existence of a similarly shaped imperial porphyry sarcophagus in Constantinople is

gical Museum. See G. Mendel, *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et byzantines, Musées Impériaux Ottomans*, I (Constantinople, 1912), p. xff.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 11 ff.

²⁵ "Sarcophages impériaux de Rome et de Constantinople," *BZ*, XXX (1929/30), pp. 582-7.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 227.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 19 ff.

²⁸ *La main divine dans l'histoire, ou essai pour déblayer cette science. Etudes sur deux sarcophages, l'un tolérant, l'autre intolérant* (Constantinople, 1869).

²⁹ Downey, *op. cit.*, p. 31, no. 43; cf. Leo Grammaticus, p. 94. Mesarites' statement that the sarcophagus of Constantine I was rectangular is not particularly helpful ("Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople," ed. Downey, *Trans. Amer. Philos. Soc.*, N. S., XLVII [1957], p. 915, § xxxix. 4).

³⁰ Mr. Grierson suggests that this happened between 390 and 395. See *supra*, p. 40f.

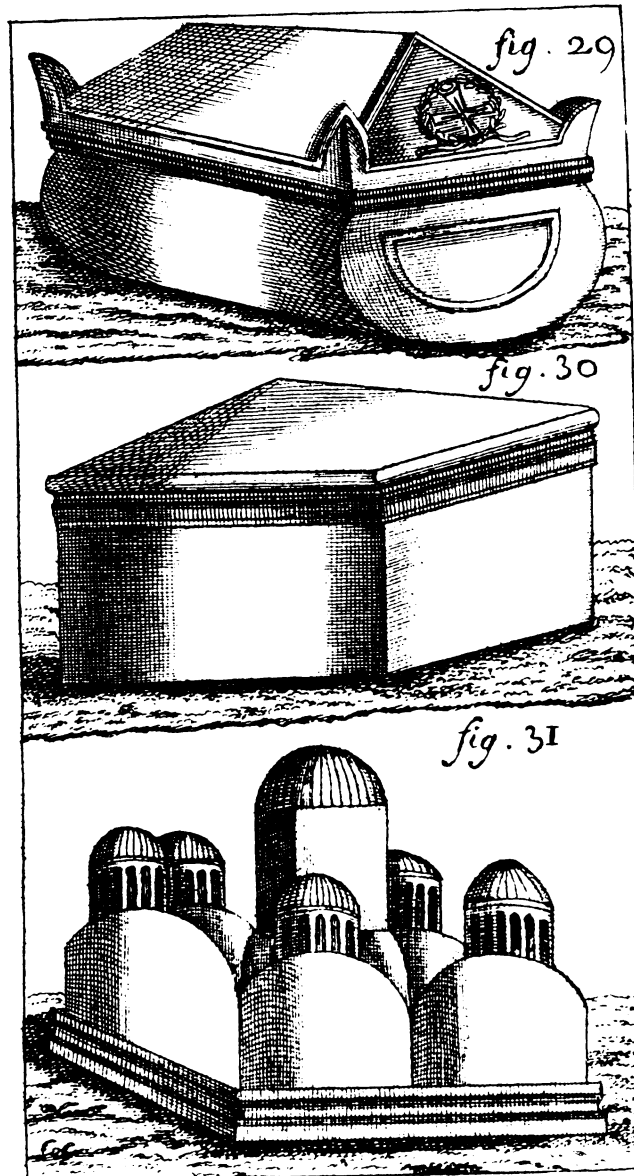
³¹ *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies*, V (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 42 ff.

surely interesting.³² Whether the latter was an original work of the fourth-fifth century A.D., or consisted of a more ancient trough to

³² The dimensions of the Constantinopolitan sarcophagus were, furthermore, fairly close to those of the Sicilian ones (listed by Deér, *op. cit.*, p. 166). The maximum length of the former was 2.275 m. as compared to 2.36–2.39 for the

which a gabled lid was added, is a question that cannot now be answered.

Sicilian sarcophagi. The width 1.14 m. as compared to 0.945–1.18. The trough of the sarcophagus seen by Flachet was, however, somewhat higher than that of the Sicilian ones: 0.975 m. as opposed to 0.665–0.74.



1. Byzantine Sarcophagi



2.



3.

Constantinople, Imperial Byzantine Sarcophagi